



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.  
University of Arizona  
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May 2, 1994

President Hojatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani  
Palestine Avenue  
Azerbaijan Interesction  
Tehran, Iran

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association is concerned about the news of the arrest and detention of the writer and academic Ali Akbar Saidi-Sirjani. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2300 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

According to our information, Mr. Saidi-Sirjani, who has taught at Columbia University in New York and contributed scholarly articles to works such as the Encyclopedia Iranica, was arrested on March 14. We understand that there has been public speculation that he will be accused of drug trafficking. However, we believe that, in the circumstances, the motives for arresting him may have been to punish him for the peaceful expression of dissident political views. He has been outspoken in expressing his political opinions and his criticisms of government censorship, and his books have been banned in Iran. In addition, Mr. Saidi-Sirjani had been called in for questioning by security officials several times before his arrest, which suggests that his was not an ordinary criminal case.

We respectfully request you to provide us with information as soon as possible about the reasons for his detention and the nature of the charges being brought against him. We further call on you to investigate to ensure that this is not a case of a political dissident being held on politically inspired drug charges. In addition, should Mr. Saidi-Sirjani be brought to trial, we urge that he be provided with all the due process guarantees necessary to ensure that the proceedings are fair and in compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director

cc: Said Rajai Khorasani, Iranian Interparliamentary Group  
Ayatollah Yazdi, Head of Judiciary  
Ambassador Kamal Kharzi, Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations